DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 590 EC 220 794

TITLE	Guidelines for Assessment of Emotional Disturbance. Technical Assistance Papers.
INSTITUTION	Texas Education Agency, Austin.; Texas State Dept. of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, Austin.
REPORT NO	TEA-AD8-330-05
PUB DATE	88
NOTE	23p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Clinical Diagnosis; *Definitions; *Educational Diagnosis; Educational Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; Eligibility; *Emotional Disturbances; *Handicap Identification; Social Adjustment; Special Education; *State Standards; Student Evaluation; *Student Placement
IDENTIFIERS	Severity (of Handicap); *Texas

ABSTRACT

Four technical assistance papers developed by Texas' Joint Task Force on Emotional Disturbance comprise this manual. The first paper, "Definition of Emotional Disturbance," is intended to clarify federal regulations and Texas State Board of Education rules on identifying emotionally disturbed students. Specific citations from appropriate legal codes are given and the text following each citation discusses the rule or regulation as it relates to identification and/or assessment issues. The second paper, "Establishing Educational Need for Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Students," addresses the two-step process of assessing eligibility for special education services through determining the student's condition and educational need. The paper also describes educational needs in academic, behavioral, and developmental domains; and outlines the procedural steps involved in establishing educational need. The final two papers, titled "Determining the Severity of Serious Emotional Disturbance: Decision-Making Guidelines" and "Differential Diagnosis of Social Maladjustment or Serious Emotional Disturbance," provide information to assist professionals in (1) assessing the severity of emotional illness and (2) differentiating between serious emotional disturbance and social maladjustment. (JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED310590

Guidelines for Assessment of Emotional Disturbance

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PAPERS FROM THE TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY AND TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL RETARDATION JOINT TASK FORCE ON EMOTIONAL DISTRUBANCE

EC 220794

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Linda Kemp

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Guidelines for Assessment of Emotional Disturbance

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PAPERS
FROM THE TEXAS EDUCATION
AGENCY AND TEXAS DEPARTMENT
OF MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL
RETARDATION JOINT TASK FORCE
ON EMOTIONAL DISTRUBANCE

Table of Contents

Definition of Emotional Disturbance 1

Establishing Educational Need for Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Students 9

Determining the Severity of Serious Emotional Disturbance Decision-Making Guidelines 13

Differential Diagnosis of Social Maladjustment or Serious Emotional Disturbance 15

Definition of Emotional Disturbance

The following discussion is intended to clarify aspects of federal regulations and State Board of Education rules for handicapped students on identifying emotionally disturbed students. The indented portions are specific citations from the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations (34 CFR) of Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142). The text following each citation discusses the rule or regulation as it relates to identification and/or assessment issues.

The first part of this paper pertains to Board rules concerning the definition of emotionally disturbed students.

19 TAC 89.211(g)(3), Handicapped Students.

(A) A student who is emotionally disturbed is one who has been evaluated by a licensed or certified psychologist, a psychiatrist, or a psychological associate under the direct supervision of a licensed or certified psychologist who determines that the student meets the criteria as defined in 34 Code of Federal Regulations 300.5(b)(8) (relating to Handicapped Children).

(B) The report of individual assessment from the evaluating professional must specify:

(1) the type and severity of the emotional disturbance;

(2) the functional implications of the disability for situations involving instruction;

(3) the degree to which in-school and out-of-school behavior reflects symptoms consistent with the diagnosis and identification of behavior considered to be a direct result of the emotional handicap; and

(4) recommendations for behavioral management in the educational setting.

Board rules on referral for comprehensive individual assessment [89.232(b)(3)] require school professionals to try a variety of interventions within the regular school program before referral for assessment for consideration of a serious emotional disturbance. This requirement stipulates that, in order to refer a student, information written must be submitted which documents previous educational efforts and strategies provided for the student and the results of those efforts, including participation in or consideration for other special programs operated by the district. Interventions (such as modifications for the student's instructional program, compensatory education, and school counseling) should have been attempted to ascertain whether a student's problems are amenable to these techniques. If a student's emotional-behavioral problems respond to these interventions, there is less likelihood of a need for special education services. If these interventions are not effective, there will be an increased likelihood that the student may have a need for special education services. However, the regular education staff should be able to document that a number of educational efforts were used accurately over a long enough period of time to determine their results.

Before referral for assessment for consideration of serious emotional disturbance, the regular education staff also should be able to document that a student's emotional-behavioral problems are not situation-specific. The problems should have occurred for a long enough period of time and in enough different school environments to document that the emotional-behavioral difficulties appear to be generalized and persistent. If the problems have occurred over a period of time in different school settings, there will be an increased likelihood that the student may be found to be eligible for special education services.

Board rules [89.211(g)(3)] specify the certification necessary for a professional to complete an evaluation of a serious emotional disturbance for special education purposes. A psychologist or psychiatrist must describe a student's emotional problems and certify that a student has the characteristics of serious emotional disturbance, as specified in 34 CFR 300.5(b)(8). A psychological associate may complete the testing but must be supervised by a licensed or certified psychologist to finalize the evaluation, according to 89.211(g)(3). Only licensed or certified psychologists, psychiatrists, or psychological associates under the direct supervision of licensed or certified psychologists are authorized by this rule to perform evaluations of emotionally disturbed students regarding the presence or absence of an emotional condition. Therefore, assessment professionals with certification only as educational diagnosticians may not conduct evaluations to determine a student's eligibility as emotionally disturbed.

Federal regulations regarding evaluation procedures [34 CFR 300.532(e)] require that the evaluation be conducted by a multidisciplinary team or group of persons, including at least one teacher or other specialist with knowledge in the area of suspected disability (in this case, emotional disturbance). The psychologist's/psychiatrist's diagnostic statement is only one part of the comprehensive assessment report which is presented to the admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee. The psychologist/psychiatrist should have considered all available referral and assessment information, including the student's past and present school performance, before determining whether or not a student exhibits characteristics of a serious emotional disturbance.

A diagnostic statement is necessary but may not be enough to qualify a student as seriously emotionally disturbed. It depends upon the extent to which the psychologist's/psychiatrist's and other reports determine that the identified emotional condition adversely affects the student's educational performance. An eligibility determination requires two steps. First, a diagnostic statement by a psychologist/psychiatrist certifying that the student has an emotional condition characteristic of serious emotional disturbance, as set forth in 34 CFR 300.5(b)(8)(i)(A)-(E), which second, results in a need for special education services.

The ARD committee is responsible for determining whether the student has a need for special education services or whether the student's needs can be accommodated by modification of the regular instructional program. According to state law [TEC 16.104(c)], a need for special education is indicated when the student's emotional condition is psychologically or psychiatrically determined to be such that he/she cannot be adequately or safely educated in the regular classes of the public schools without the provision of special services.

A determination that a student is eligible for special education services as emotionally disturbed would be based upon: (a) the committee's agreement with the psychologist's/psychiatrist's diagnosis and (b) the ARD committee's determination that the emotional condition results in an inability to make reasonable educational progress without special education services. A determination that a student is not eligible would be based upon the committee's finding that the student's emotional problems are not manifested in the school setting and/or the student does not require special education services to make reasonable educational progress.

The ARD committee does not automatically accept a diagnosis of emotional disturbance from a psychologist/psychiatrist. A student could have serious emotional problems which have no educational consequences and do not require special education intervention. In these situations, the ARD committee would determine that the student does not meet the eligibility criteria for serious emotional disturbance, according to federal regulations and state laws.

Another responsibility of the ARD committee is to develop the student's individual educational plan (IEP). The ARD committee will consider the recommendations of the assessment professionals in determining the modifications of instructional content, setting, methods, or materials required by the student to achieve and maintain satisfactory progress in regular, remedial, and supportive programs. The committee will develop goals specified in the student's IEP based upon the areas of need identified by the assessment team and ARD committee members.

The next part of this document pertains to the 34 Code of Federal Regulations which implement Public Law 94-142. The particular section presented for discussion outlines the federal definition of serious emotional disturbance.

34 CFR 300.5(b), Handicapped Children.

(8) Seriously emotionally disturbed is defined as follows...

Federal regulations include the descriptor "seriously" in the definition of emotional disturbance. A student must have a severe emotional condition to be eligible for special education services. The seriously emotionally disturbed category is meant to include only students whose emotional conditions are significant enough to have been manifested over a long period of time and to a marked degree. Many students with emotional problems may not be eligible for special education services. Mental health incidence figures such as the President's Commission on Mental Health, 1978, suggest that 10% or more of all students have some emotional problems; yet less than 1% are identified by the United States Department of Education to be receiving special education services as seriously emotionally disturbed.

(i) the term means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics...

To be eligible as seriously emotionally disturbed, a psychologist or psychiatrist must determine that a student has an "emotional condition" which is manifested by one or more of the five characteristics listed in federal regulations. Any of the five characteristics can be observed in students who are not seriously emotionally disturbed. For example, students who present discipline problems to school personnel may show "inappropriate behavior" but may not otherwise be seriously emotionally disturbed. Other students may be social isolates (for example, having few or no close friends, being emotionally cold and aloof) by choice, and their unsatisfactory "interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers" may not be a symptom of serious emotional disturbance.

Psychologists and psychiatrists generally consider various characteristics in diagnosing students as seriously emotionally disturbed. Students may be considered for this label when they have disproportionate lack of control of their emotional responses, minimal tolerance for the stresses of everyday living, intermittent or sustained internal distress regarding their problems, or when they may be dangerous to themselves and/or others. The emotional problems should be manifested in the student's behaviors, as well as thoughts and feelings, and should be apparent across different environments. Assessment data supporting the

diagnosis of serious emotional disturbance may include behavioral information, as well as self-report and personality measures, to assess the student's emotional-behavioral functioning.

. . .over a long period of time. . .

The serious emotional disturbance must be an established condition which has developed over a long period of time and is expected to continue for an indeterminate period in the future. The serious emotional disturbance should not be transitory.

The intent of this specification—that the emotional condition be present "over a long period of time"—is to distinguish emotional reactions to short-term trauma, family crises, and the like (which would not qualify for eligibility as emotionally disturbed) from long-standing, serious emotional conditions with clear educational consequences (which would qualify for eligibility as emotionally disturbed). One implication is that regular support services and community resources should be used to help students deal with these crises. Another implication is that many short-term emotional problems are resolved through the normal process of development, requiring no outside intervention.

The federal regulation defines neither "long" nor "period of time," and, therefore, the determination is left to professional judgment. Careful collection of information from many sources (home, school, community) should help define the time of onset and duration of the emotional problems. The sociological component of the comprehensive individual assessment, as well as the psychological/psychiatric assessment, should include this information for students being assessed for eligibility as seriously emotionally disturbed. Sociological variables may also be assessed by social workers, counselors, visiting teachers, and educational diagnosticians. The severity, the duration of emotional problems, the intensity of situational stressors, and the age of the child must all be considered in making this determination.

In general, the more severe the manifestations of the emotional problem, the shorter the time that may be needed to document the presence of a serious emotional disturbance. The more stressful the child's home, school, and other circumstances (i.e., the more severe the situational stressors), the longer the time period should be to ascertain that the emotional reaction is not a short-term response to stress. However, evaluators should take into consideration that, when examining younger children, shorter time periods constitute a greater proportion of their lives, as compared with older children.

Whenever possible, research results should be considered in determining the effects of situational stressors on the lives of children. For example, research shows that it can take children as long as two years after a divorce to return to expected achievement and social behavior levels.

. . .to a marked degree.

The student must exhibit the characteristics of the serious emotional disturbance to a "marked" or significant degree. The facts that an emotional disturbance must be "serious" and that the degree of impairment must be "marked" underscore the need for careful consideration of the student's level of functioning. The psychologist/psychiatrist must determine that the dysfunctional behaviors and emotions which characterize the serious emotional disturbance are exhibited at a significantly greater rate and/or intensity than seen in the student's peer group. The maladaptive behaviors must also be demonstrated across different environments instead of being situation-specific. The characteristic behaviors of the seriously emotionally disturbed student should occur infrequently within the nonhandicapped student population.

. . . which adversely affects educational performance.

The serious emotional disturbance must have observable, adverse educational consequences, and the psychologist/psychiatrist and the other evaluators must provide evidence to the ARD committee that the student's serious emotional disturbance impairs classroom performance. The impairment should be judged against the standard of reasonable classroom progress, not optimal progress. The need for special education services should be based on whether the emotional condition interferes with the student making reasonable progress within regular education and not on speculation as to whether the student is achieving in an optimal or maximal manner. There are many students who are not performing within the classroom at the most desirable level due to emotional-behavioral problems. However, if they are making reasonable progress and their needs can be accommodated within regular education, then they should not be put in special education.

For special education eligibility, the student's emotional problems should always result in lowered achievement, lowered grades, and/or dysfunctional behavior in academic situations. Documentation must be provided that these problems are significant enough to require interventions that cannot be provided within regular education.

(A) an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;

The federal definition specifies an "inability" to learn. This excludes students with learning impairments who are, however, able to learn and make some academic progress. Some students who may qualify under this criterion are psychotic, for whom the impairment in reality testing interferes with learning.

The fact that a student has intellectual, sensory, or health problems does not automatically disqualify the student from meeting this criterion for serious emotional disturbance. However, the psychologist's/psychiatrist's report must document that the inability to learn is not due to these problems.

(B) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;

A student with a serious disturbance in interpersonal relationships, that is, an "inability to build or maintain" these relationships, may qualify as being seriously emotionally disturbed. However, a student would not be eligible under this criterion if he/she has satisfactory relationships with teachers or with peers either in or out of school settings.

This criterion specifies an "inability" to enter into and maintain relationships. There must be evidence that a student cannot establish or maintain relationships with peers across several environments (home, school, community) or with teachers in the school environment. The student may have acquaintances, but these relationships must be determined to be less permanent and intense than friendships.

It is likely that the term "satisfactory" refers to the appropriateness of the student's relationships. The psychologist/psychiatrist must compare the student's relationships with age peers to determine whether the relationships are appropriate or satisfactory. The types of relationships developed by the student should be atypical and deviant from the student's peer group (classmates, neighborhood friends).

The criterion for judging the student's relationships with teachers should be the adequacy of the student's relationships with the majority of his/her regular classroom teachers. That is, to qualify as seriously

emotionally disturbed, the student would not behave appropriately toward regular teachers. Some seriously emotionally disturbed students are able to build or maintain relationships with specially trained teachers. However, these teachers accommodate their behavior to the special needs of the seriously emotionally disturbed student instead of maintaining routine expectations for adequate interpersonal relationships with students.

(C) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;

All students with behavior/discipline problems are not also seriously emotionally disturbed. The inappropriate behavior must be significantly deviant from expectations for age-level peers, occurring with very low frequency in students across different types of environments.

The inappropriate behavior can be withdrawn, deviant, or bizarre behavior, not just aggressive or acting-out behavior. Some seriously emotionally disturbed students express their inappropriate behavior or feelings through confused verbalizations, fantasizing, preoccupation with emotional conflicts in their art work and written expression, or through other such outlets.

Certain factors must be taken into account in determining whether a behaviorally disturbed student is also emotionally disturbed. Some students are disturbing to others although they are not themselves emotionally disturbed. Such a student will be more likely to be diagnosed as emotionally disturbed if the disturbance has an internal component (for example, the students feels emotionally upset and/or perceives the environment in an unusual or distorted manner), if the student does not seem to have control of the misbehavior, and if the behavior problems are disturbing to the student as well as to others. These emotional components of the disturbance must be observable in the child's behavior, verbalizations, fantasy productions, and so forth.

The psychologist/psychiatrist must decide whether the student's inappropriate responses are occurring "under normal circumstances." When a student's home or school situation is not normal (disrupted by stress, recent changes, or similar conditions), the psychologist/psychiatrist should take this into account.

In some cases a student's serious emotional disturbance can be traced to abnormal stressful situations in the past and even in the present. If a student's behavior is an adaptive response to an atypical environment, the child should not be judged to be seriously emotionally disturbed. However, the fact that a student's home environment is or was judged to be deviant should not disqualify a student for consideration as seriously emotionally disturbed if the student's inappropriate behavior and feelings have become generalized and persistent ways of reacting to normal everyday circumstances of the child's life.

A later section of this paper will address the issue of social maladjustment. A socially maladjusted student will qualify for special education services only when that student is also emotionally disturbed or meets the criteria for another handicapping condition. A socially maladjusted student may show "inappropriate behavior" which can be related to other influences (peer group culture, adolescent rebellion, and neighborhood norms) rather than to emotional disturbance. An emotionally disturbed student may manifest characteristics such as confused thinking, emotional overreactions, anxiety, guilt, and unpremeditated or impulsive acting-out behaviors, which are less likely to be seen in students whose inappropriate behavior can best be described as socially maladjusted.

(D) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; . . .

This characteristic includes behaviors, thoughts, and feelings which signal "unhappiness." This unhappiness or depression must be "general" and "pervasive," that is, occurring over most if not all of the student's life situations. The depression must be significant and marked, resulting in impairment of the student's educational functioning.

To qualify as a serious emotional disturbance, the depressive mood should be atypical for the student's age. Adolescents, for example, tend to go through periods of depression with a higher frequency and with greater intensity than elementary school children. The extent of the depression should be judged in comparison with children of the same age.

. . .or

(E) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Some students reveal their emotional disturbances through physical symptoms. This criterion seems to require input by the school nurse, physician, and/or others to rule out physical symptoms with medical causes unrelated to emotional disturbance. As is the case with the other characteristics of the seriously emotionally disturbed student, the physical symptoms must be severe and must impair the student's educational functioning to a significant degree. The physical symptoms may appear on an intermittent basis, but the tendency to respond to stress with physical symptoms must be a habitual and persistent behavior pattern.

Other students reveal their emotional disturbances through fearful or withdrawn behavior. Although less easily identifiable than the disturbing student with acting-out inappropriate behavior, withdrawn students can be identified as seriously emotionally disturbed. A student who meets this criterion may be unusually or pathologically anxious and fearful across settings, including the school setting, to the extent that attendance and/or achievement are affected.

(ii) The term includes children who are schizophrenic . . .

All students diagnosed as schizophrenic are classified as seriously emotionally disturbed. Schizophrenic children are classified as psychotic because of their thought disorders (overly confused thought patterns) and impairments in reality testing (difficulty separating reality from fantasy).

In some cases, a student's schizophrenic symptoms have an acute onset. Because of this provision of the federal regulations, these students may be diagnosed as seriously emotionally disturbed without waiting for the disorder to persist over a long period of time.

. . .The term does not include children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are seriously emotionally disturbed.

Inappropriate or socially maladjusted behavior per se is not sufficient for a diagnosis of serious emotional disturbance unless the student shows other signs of serious emotional disturbance. This term seems to preclude delinquent or antisocial behaviors from automatically being labeled as seriously emotionally disturbed.

Socially maladjusted students display behaviors which may be described as "inappropriate." However, these inappropriate behaviors are not always symptoms of serious emotional disturbance. These students violate standards of social behavior in the classroom and usually within the general cultural setting. However, the socially maladjusted student may be following acceptable standards of conduct in the home or neighborhood environment or within the peer group. The socially maladjusted student is less likely to express anxiety or internal distress over his or her behavior (with the possible exception of remorse occurring in punishment situations). The behavior of the socially maladjusted student may be described as manipulative rather than disturbed and may be guided by the student's perceptions of his or her own self-interest, even if adults and authority figures see the behaviors as ultimately self-defeating to the student.

A student may have the characteristics of social maladjustment and may or may not also be seriously emotionally disturbed. To qualify as a seriously emotionally disturbed student, the student must show seriously disturbed behaviors in addition to the socially maladjusted behavior.

Adopted unanimously by the Joint Task Force on Emotional Disturbance

---

Establishing Educational Need for Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Students

Identifying a student as "seriously emotionally disturbed" (SED) according to federal and state laws requires school systems to consider the emotional condition and educational needs of the student when determining eligibility for special education services. The handicapped student must have a "condition" (i.e., disability) and an "educational need" that justifies restricting the educational environment. Under Public Law 94-142, Texas state law [TEC 21.503(b)(1)] defines a handicapped student as a child between the ages of 3 and 21, inclusive, with a disability so limiting that special education services are required in place of or in addition to instruction in the regular classroom. A seriously emotionally disturbed student is defined in the law as a student whose emotional condition is psychologically or psychiatrically determined to be such that the student cannot be ADEQUATELY educated in the regular classes of the public schools and/or cannot be SAFELY educated in the regular classes of the public schools. [TEC 21.503(b)(6)].

The *Guidelines for Assessment* technical assistance bulletin, October 1984, establishes the criteria for educational need for all handicaps (pp. 46-53). The bulletin defines assessment for eligibility for special education services as a two-step process:

- determining the condition (disability); and
- determining educational need.

The guidelines state that determining the condition should occur FIRST and testing to establish educational need should occur AFTER the disability has been established. Eligibility for services occurs when the identified disability interferes with the student's educational progress. That is, the problems the student is experiencing are a direct result of his/her identified disability and can only be remediated through special education services. The handicapping condition suspected after the first phase of the eligibility assessment (i.e., identification of the disability) will help define the areas of assessment appropriate for the second phase (i.e., educational need). The referral information will also help define the types and levels of assessment necessary to establish educational need.

The educational need of an SED student can be documented in academic, behavioral, and developmental domains. *Guidelines for Assessment* established educational need for all handicaps in these domains as follows:

1. Academic
   Assessment should provide evidence that the student does not achieve commensurate with age and ability levels when provided with appropriate learning experiences, to the extent the student cannot adequately be served in the regular classes.

   Classroom functioning must be "below average" performance for the grade. (pp. 46-47)

2. Behavioral
   . . . while some students may be able to maintain acceptable academic achievement levels in certain situations or environments, their disabilities interfere with their ability to interact appropriately with their teachers and/or peers. For these students, educational need must be defined in terms of behavior rather than academic achievement. (p. 47)

3. Developmental

. . . other students, because of their young age or the severity of their disabilities, cannot be assessed appropriately using the usual measures of academic achievement or behavioral standards. The need for special education services of this third group must be defined in developmental terms. (p. 47)

The educational need of an SED student can be addressed as follows in these domains:

1. Academic

"cannot be adequately educated in regular class. . ."

Possible Indicators: failing grades, consistent noncompletion of assignments leading to failure, significant lack of mastery of essential elements commensurate with age.

NOTE: This assumes that all options in the regular class (average, remedial, etc.) have been considered or tried and the services needed by the student can be provided only through special education services.

2. Behavioral

"cannot be adequately educated in regular class. . ."; or

"cannot be safely educated in regular class. . ."

Possible Indicators: discipline and behavioral referrals indicating a high level of inappropriate behaviors that concern the safety of self or others; behavior rating scales indicating behaviors significantly different from the norm; disruptive behaviors interfering with student's learning to the point of failure; fantasizing and/or withdrawal behavior that results in noncompletion of assignments to the point of failure, chronic disruption to the student's educational process resulting in failure, posing a danger to self or others.

3. Adaptive Behavior/Developmental

"cannot be adequately educated in regular class. . ."; and/or

"cannot be safely educated in regular class. . ."

Possible Indicators: extremely immature behavior for age that endangers self or others, significant developmental deficits on adaptive behavior scales in the areas of interpersonal skills and sociability for preschool children.

The educational need of an SED student can be traced from the referral information and throughout the assessment. Information to consider should include (but not be limited to) discipline referral information, test results, and parent- and teacher-supplied information about functionality in the educational setting. As many SED students may have long discipline histories, evaluators should specifically address in the psychological report and on the eligibility form all behaviors noted in the referral information and in the testing situation concerning the relationship or linkage to the behavioral handicap.

Process for Establishing Educational Need

STEP 1: Establish Area of Disability

Referral data should indicate a need for psychological testing based on the student's behavior and performance in the classroom and school setting. If referral information indicates a behavioral disability, the student should be referred for psychological testing. The student referred for assessment for the SED handicap must be evaluated by a psychiatrist, licensed or certified psychologist, or a psychological associate under the supervision of a licensed psychologist and must qualify under PL 94-142 guidelines for the disability. A DSM III diagnosis can be used to identify the type of disturbance, but cannot be used in lieu of PL 94-142 guidelines to qualify a student for special education services.

STEP 2: Establish Educational Need

a. Review referral data to identify areas in need of assessment, considering the student's academic, behavioral, and adaptive behavior/developmental skills and performance. Discipline histories should be included in this information.

b. Assess the student in the needed domains.

1. Academic. A full educational battery establishing ability and achievement levels is necessary. Information should include skill levels, learning styles, and work pace. If modifications are needed, strategies or individual educational plan (IEP) modifications can be suggested to the admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee.

2. Behavioral. A full behavioral testing battery establishing areas of behavioral disabilities, behavioral areas in need of remediation, and discipline needs is necessary. Information about behaviors noted in the referral should include whether those behaviors adversely affect the student's performance so that he/she "cannot be adequately educated in the regular class" and/or "cannot be safely educated in the regular class," resulting in an educational need. Behavior rating scales, teacher interviews, behavior checklists, parent data, discipline histories, and psychological data can and should be used to identify behaviors that adversely affect student performance. Behaviors should be noted as having "a direct relationship to the handicap" or "not having a direct relationship to the handicap" by the evaluator in the psychological report and on the eligibility form. The ARD committee should note the behavior linkage to the handicap when developing the IEP for behavior management and discipline options. If a DSM III diagnosis is given, the evaluator should identify in the diagnosis the behaviors exhibited by the student and indicate if the behaviors are "related to the handicap."

3. Adaptive Behavior/Developmental. If the student is preschool age, his/her adaptive behavior should be assessed using checklists, parent interviews, etc.

STEP 3: The ARD committee should review the behaviors related to the handicap which established the disability and educational need in regard to the following questions:

a. Do the behaviors identified as "part of the handicapping condition" violate the school discipline policy? If so, then the student cannot follow regular discipline, and will need a behavior management plan with discipline options in his/her IEP.

b. Does the student's reality testing interfere with his/her ability to follow regular discipline? If so, then the student may not be able to follow regular discipline in stressful situations and will need a behavior management plan with discipline options in his/her IEP.

c. If the answers to a. and b. are NO, then: can the student follow regular discipline? If so, the ARD committee should indicate that fact in the IEP and should follow the process established for discipline of special education students under state guidelines.

Adopted unanimously by the Joint Task Force on Emotional Disturbance

---

Determining the Severity of Serious Emotional Disturbance: Decision-Making Guidelines

Texas State Board of Education rules require that a diagnosis of serious emotional disturbance (SED) under Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142) include a statement indicating "the type and severity of the emotional disturbance." The "type" of emotional disturbance is specified by listing one or more of the five characteristics described in PL 94-142 as indicative of the emotional disturbance. [CFR 300.5(b)(8)(i)] The "severity" of the emotional disturbance is first indicated by the professional decision that the student does have a serious emotional disturbance. Within the category of serious emotional disturbance "severity" is usually described on a continuum of mild to severe disturbance. This paper provides guidelines to help the professional make this judgment.

Factors to Consider

In determining the "degree of severity" for SED students, consider these factors:

- restrictiveness of placement needed (educational need);
- intensity of symptoms; and
- duration of symptoms.

The following table may be useful:

		PLACEMENT			
		Itinerant/ Resource Room	**Partial Self-Contained**	**Campus Self-Contained**	**Alternative Self-Contained**
INTENSITY & DURATION	Less intense/ shorter	mild	mild to moderate	moderate	moderate to severe
	More intense/ longer	mild to moderate	moderate	moderate to severe	severe

Definitions/Clarifications

Restrictiveness of placement needed is determined mainly by degree that SED symptoms interfere with education, although other factors such as IQ and achievement are also used in placement decisions.

Intensity: This is the degree of distortion in the student's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings as compared to average peer groups. Problems in reality testing should always be considered "moderate to severe" or "severe."

Duration: The time from onset of symptoms to diagnosis must be long enough to satisfy the criterion, "over a long period of time." Professional judgment should be used, taking into account the student's age and the nature of the problems. In general, the younger the student and the more severe the emotional condition, the shorter the time period needed to establish a diagnosis of serious emotional disturbance. The recency and intensity of the precipitating events should also be considered. In general, the more recent and intense the precipitating events, the longer the duration of time needed to differentiate an acute stress response from serious emotional disturbance. Schizophrenic students are always diagnosed as seriously emotionally disturbed regardless of the time period after the onset of symptoms.

Dimensions

Since SED comprises both affective and behavioral dimensions, some students manifest different degrees of disturbance in these areas. In such cases, describe both degrees of disturbance, for example:

> "Although Albert's behavioral disturbance is severe, the degree of emotionally-based distortion in his thoughts and feelings is mild to moderate."

Special Considerations

The table on the preceding page is most readily applicable in relatively clear-cut SED cases. Determining the severity of SED is more difficult when:

- SED is complicated by other handicapping conditions (LD, MR, physical) or by ability/achievement levels that necessitate a more restrictive setting;
- SED is moderate/severe, but has only a mild effect on academic performance and thus can be addressed in a minimally restrictive setting (e.g., some depressed but not acting-out students);
- SED is relatively mild, but has a significant effect on academic performance or behavior and thus requires a more restrictive setting (e.g., impulsive, acting-out students); or
- evidence for SED comes primarily from teacher/parent reports and is not entirely supported by projectives. For example, classroom behavior may suggest the need for immediate intervention, but projective results are equivocal. Many factors (situational stress, poor discipline, social maladjustment, physical conditions, sociological factors) can and do cloud the issue. Testing conditions and student personality types (e.g., defensiveness, lack of verbal ability) also affect projective test results.

Rule of Thumb

Determine the severity of SED in and of itself, apart from all other extraneous factors. Then, in special cases such as those described above, explain the "complications" and present an integrated, coherent account of the entire picture. For example:

> "The degree of emotional disturbance is mild; however, Ivan's emotional problems are compounded by his attention deficit disorder and by family instability. These problems, in combination, significantly interfere with academic progress..."

Adopted unanimously by the Joint Task Force on Emotional Disturbance

Differential Diagnosis of Social Maladjustment or Serious Emotional Disturbance

A difficult diagnostic issue facing assessment personnel is the differentiation between serious emotional disturbance and social maladjustment. Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142) stipulates that students cannot be diagnosed as seriously emotionally disturbed if their behaviors stem only from social maladjustment. However, students may be diagnosed as both socially maladjusted and seriously emotionally disturbed. This paper presents guidelines to help differentiate between behaviors which are indicative solely of either serious emotional disturbance or social maladjustment. The discussion which follows concentrates on one of the five characteristics of serious emotional disturbance: CFR 300.5(b)(8)(i)(c), "inappropriate types of behavior," which may be indicative of serious emotional disturbance and/or social maladjustment.

Behaviors which could indicate social maladjustment or serious emotional disturbance:

"Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances"
[CFR 300.5(b)(8)(i)(c)]

These behaviors may violate socially accepted behavior standards in the school and community. Examples include fighting, stealing, lying, rule breaking, defiance or rebellion against authority, substance abuse, truancy, work refusal, inappropriate need-gratifying behaviors, and sexual acting-out.

Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED)	Social Maladjustment
A. Differential criteria set forth in PL 94-142	
1. "..condition.." Inappropriate behaviors must be indicative of an emotional condition. The condition is documented by behavior observations, self-report (interviews, questionnaires), projective responses in the following areas:	1. Inappropriate behaviors which orginate in social maladjustment and are not indicative of an emotional condition:
• Feelings are often emotional overreactions including anxiety, depression, guilt.	• Emotional overreactions may occur only when behavior is criticized and punishment is applied. Anger is the most frequent reaction.
• Thoughts may be inappropriate to situation, confused, bizarre, tangential, emotionally overloaded.	• Thoughts are usually practically related to situations.

Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED)	Social Maladjustment
• Perceptions are often not congruent with usual perceptions of reality and can be confused or overly suspicious.	• Perceptions are usually practically related to situations and congruent with other people's perceptions.
• Behaviors may be idiosyncratic, unusual, bizarre, as well as inappropriate.	• Behavior may be goal directed, self-serving, and manipulative. Student acts according to own perception of self-interest (even though others may consider behavior to be self-defeating).
• Lack of social awareness. Student may not understand or may misinterpret social conventions and behavioral expectations.	• Student usually understands, but chooses not to accept, general social conventions and behavior standards. However, student may accept and follow counter-cultural standards of neighborhood and peer groups.
2. Exhibited . . . "over a long period of time . . ."	2. Socially maladjusted behaviors may or may not be exhibited over a long time period.
• SED behaviors must be persistent, generalized, inappropriate behaviors over time and situations.	• May often be situation-specific rather than occurring in many situations.
	• Are often not observed until pre-adolescence or adolescence.
3. . . . "to a marked degree . . ."	3. Socially maladjusted behaviors:
• Serious problems.	• May or may not be serious.
• Low frequency in peer group.	• May occur with higher frequency in delinquent peer group.
4. . . . "which adversely affects educational performance."	4. Socially maladjusted behaviors:
• SED behaviors result in a demonstrable educational need in achievement, grades and/or dysfunctional behaviors in academic situations.	• May or may not have adverse affect on educational performance.
	• Educational deficits, when present, are often related to truancy, tardiness, work refusal and occasionally to limited intellect or educational background.
	• A subgroup of socially maladjusted students have a history of language deficits and lowered verbal intelligence which predisposes them to chronic educational problems and social maladjustment related to lack of success.

Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED)	Social Maladjustment
B. Associated Characteristics	
1. SED student usually has limited or no social support for inappropriate behavior.	1. Possible home, neighborhood, and/or peer support for socially maladjusted behavior.
2. SED student usually demonstrates limited self-control. • Low frustration tolerance, emotional over-reactions, and impulsivity are common. • SED student often displays limited premeditation or planning and has limited ability to predict consequences of behavior. • Behavior escalates quickly and cool down periods are often needed.	2. Socially maladjusted students have variable rather than limited self-control. They may preplan behavior and may be vigilant in social situations to avoid detection of misbehavior. Misbehavior may be goal-directed, even though the goals may be limited rather than long range. Socially maladjusted students may be able to stop misbehavior quickly if apprehended by authorities.
3. SED behaviors generally are dissocial and have no clear relationship to social mores or law enforcement.	3. Socially maladjusted behaviors are asocial in that they violate social conventions and often exploit others. Attitudes and behaviors are generally anti-law enforcement; law enforcement officers are seen as interfering with the achievement of their self-interest.
4. Inappropriate behavior is disturbing to the SED student. • May experience anxiety, guilt, depression, distress. • SED student often expresses desires to want to change or improve behavior.	4. Inappropriate behavior is not disturbing to socially maladjusted students. • Limited emotion may be attached to misbehavior. • Socially maladjusted student may have an incentive to continue misbehavior to reach goals.
5. Social relationships are distorted and may be characterized by inappropriate dependence and over-closeness and/or inappropriate rebellion and defiance.	5. Social relationships tend to be superficial and transitory, although loyalty may be given to a delinquent peer group.
6. Self-esteem is usually low and self-concept is usually distorted.	6. Socially maladjusted student may appear to others to have adequate self-esteem and self-concepts; however, feelings of inadequacy often underlie veneer of adequacy. Student may show bravado and "macho" attitudes.

Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED)	Social Maladjustment
7. SED student is often preoccupied with his/her conflicts and overly self-concerned; however, some SED students translate their problems into behavior immediately and have limited self-awareness.	7. Socially maladjusted students often have a very superficial sense of self and are rarely self-reflective.
8. Because of the characteristics mentioned above, including difficulty forming relationships and limited affective development, the socially maladjusted student who is not SED is less likely to respond to psychotherapeutic interventions. Alternative educational programs need to be developed for these students.	8. SED student is more likely to respond to psychotherapeutic interventions.

Adopted unanimously by the Joint Task Force on Emotional Disturbance

Fall 1988

AD8-330-05